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Going Global: The Transnational Politics of the Dalit Movement

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This article analyses the involvement of the Dalits (formerly 'untouchables') in the World Social Forum (WSF) processes. The focus will be on one networked organization in particular, the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) as a key organization which served as a catalyst for linking the Dalit struggle against neoliberal globalization and casteism with the social forum process and the global justice movement. The article argues that the Dalit struggle, domestically and internationally, can best be understood from a Polanyian perspective, as a countermovement for social protection against neoliberal globalization. It examines the dialectic of globalization within an Indian context first in terms of the impact of neoliberal globalization upon the Dalit community and then the NCDHR's decision to go global, to the WSF. In taking their cause beyond India, a central focus of Dalit activity remains rooted in making the Indian state serve as a means of social protection for the Dalit peoples.

Este artículo analiza la participación de los Dalits (previamente llamados "intocables") en los procesos del Foro Social Mundial (WSF, por sus siglas en inglés). El enfoque se concentrará particularmente en una organización en red, la Campaña Nacional por los Derechos Humanos de los Dalits (NCDHR, por sus siglas en inglés) como una organización clave que sirvió como catalizadora por haber enlazado la lucha de los Dalits contra la globalización neoliberal y el casteísmo, con el proceso del foro social y el movimiento de justicia global. El artículo plantea que la lucha de los Dalits, tanto doméstica como internacionalmente, puede entenderse mejor desde una perspectiva polanyana, como un contramovimiento para la protección social en contra de la globalización neoliberal. El mismo examina la dialéctica de la globalización dentro del contexto indio, primero en términos del impacto de la globalización neoliberal sobre la comunidad de los Dalits y luego, en términos de la decisión de la Campaña Nacional por los Derechos Humanos de los Dalits (NCDHR) de tomar una

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dirección global, hacia el Foro Social Mundial. Al llevar su causa más allá de la India, el tema central sobre la actividad de los Dalits permanece arraigado obligando al estado indio a servir como un medio de protección social para los Dalits.

Introduction

This article has as its starting point a journey to Mumbai, India, to attend the World Social Forum (WSF) in January 2004. The WSF is a recent political invention, a global venue and space which civil society organizations and movements opposed to neo-liberal globalization can call their own. In recent years the WSF and various regional and local social forums have become an important manifestation of what has become know as the Global Justice Movement (GJM). The GJM, known otherwise as globalization from below, has its roots in early struggles against neo-liberal globalization beginning with protests against the International Monetary Fund in the global south in the 1980s and later with the Zapatista Rebellion (1994) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings in Seattle (1999). Together the GJM and WSF share a common desire to 'achieve social and economic justice on the national as well as the international level' (Kolb, 2005, p. 96).

Prominent among the more than 100,000 daily participants at the WSF were the Dalits (formerly known as 'untouchables') from across India. The Dalits took full advantage of the open space of the WSF to draw attention to themselves and protest against casteism, denial of human rights, and the debilitating effects of neo-liberal globalization upon the Indian state and the Dalit community. Mumbai 2004 was a graphic illustration that the Dalit movement had inserted itself into the larger GJM by means of the WSF. In doing so, the Dalit movement added the issue of anti-casteism to the already heterogeneous concerns of the GJM, itself, composed of a wide assortment of new social movements, nongovernmental organizations, unions, and voluntary associations (Della Porta, 2005, p. 180). Dalit involvement in the GJM highlights the Janus-faced nature of globalization defined by Held, et al. as:

> A process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions ... generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power. (1999, p. 16)

That is, while globalization may disempower people, it may simultaneously empower the most marginalized groups who increasingly are acquiring the capacity to project themselves and their causes beyond their borders, in this instance, the Dalits. In doing so I argue that the actions of the Dalit are an excellent example of Karl Polanyi's 'double movement' at work (2001). That is, as market liberalism expands, in this case globally, there is a powerful countermovement within society for protection not only against economic exploitation but also against the destruction of human dignity.

Those elements of the Dalit movement that have projected themselves in the broader GJM are best described as 'rooted cosmopolitans', by which is meant:

> People and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in regular activities that require their involvement in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts. (Tarrow & Della Porta, 2005, p. 237)

Rooted cosmopolitans represent, then, a new hybrid form of politics, one in which social movements and other civil society organizations are capable of acting on a range of scales, from the

local to the global. The Dalit interventions at the WSF are a very good reminder of these dynamics between the global and the local, between space and place, market expansion and social protection.

This article analyses the contexts that spurred elements of the Dalit movement of India to become part of a broad transnational networked effort to combat neo-liberal globalization. In so doing it serves to rectify the dearth of empirical studies of why and how locally based groups become part of the GJM. The focus will be on one networked organization in particular, the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) as a key organization in this process. The article begins with a brief discussion of some methodological considerations and then discusses the implications of the concept 'rooted cosmopolitans', in particular, the relationship between the global and the local and the centrality of networks as a link between two. The article then discusses how the ideas of Polanyi can be used to situate this dynamic between the global and the local in perspective, particularly the emphasis Dalits place on the state to resist the disembedding of the economy from society. Polanyi's analysis also permits us to better understand the dialectic of globalization within an Indian context, first, in terms of the impact of neo-liberal globalization in the form of the New Economic Policy (NEP). In particular, it looks at the impact of the NEP upon the Dalit community, including the Dalit countermovement and the NCDHR's decision to go global, taking their struggle against casteism and neo-liberal globalization beyond the Indian state. I argue that in taking their cause beyond India, the Dalits have as a primary objective making the Indian state better serve the interests of the Dalit people.

Some Methodological Considerations

This research on the incorporation of the Dalit movement into the GJM and its interventions at the WSF utilizes case study methodology in which I attempt to balance the complex relationship between understanding (the subjective) and explanation (the objective) (Reitan, 2007). I attempted to understand the Dalit movement and its decision to become active on a transnational level from the perspective of the movement itself. This involved participant observation at the 2004, 2005, and 2007 World Social Forums. It also included elite interviews with Dalit leaders, subscription to a Dalit listserve, and recourse to Dalit scholarship and numerous primary documents on the impact of globalization upon the Dalits, many of which are found on Dalit websites. In terms of explanation, I benefited from the extensive secondary literature on the historical position of the Dalits in Indian society, particularly after independence. Theoretically, I draw on Polanyi's analysis in *The Great Transformation* (2001) as well as the social movement literature on network formation, framing, scaling, and the relationship between the global and the local, space and place.

I now turn to the case study itself, beginning with a discussion of globalization including a critique of how the concept has been portrayed in academe followed by a discussion of networking and the importance of place, all understood from the perspective of Polanyi's problematic.

Globalization, Networking, and the Importance of Place

Far from any notion of 'rooted cosmopolitans,' globalization was initially portrayed one-dimensionally as the triumph of space over place. According to Manuel Castells (1996), for example, the 'space of places' (state, territory, place, locality) was being subordinated to a 'space of flows'—of commodities, capital, technology, ideas, and culture across national

boundaries. Both power and function were becoming organized in a space of flows. Thus, according to Castells, 'the dominant tendency is towards a horizon of networked, ahistorical space of flows, aiming at imposing its logic over scattered, segmented places, increasingly unrelated to each other, less and less able to share cultural codes' (1996, vol. 1, p. 428).

From this perspective a one-sided optics of globalization emerges with the global becoming the dominant unit of analysis to the relative exclusion of place and territory. In recent years, however, there has been a greater awareness of how messy, complex, and contradictory globalization is (Kellner 2002). For example, Doreen Massey sees place as 'open and porous networks of social relations' produced through social contestation and inseparable from globalization in its various manifestations—trade, finance, production, migration, and social movements (quoted in Rosenau, 2004, p. 80). Place thus has a dynamic, interactive relationship with the global.

It is this nexus between the global and the local that is at the heart of the GJM which, according to Della Porta and Tarrow, 'has become a master frame of new mobilizations' addressing a variety of concerns, for example, the environment, the rights of women and indigenous people. These social movement mobilizations are projected by means of 'loosely coupled networks' that are organized 'around particular campaigns or series of campaigns' using a variety of means to advance their causes. What links these various heterogeneous networks and issues is a common 'opposition against 'neoliberal globalization' (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2005, p. 12).

These networks provide not only the space between different groups which permit them to maintain their particular identities, but also the bridge by which the global and place are linked thus facilitating a complex relationship between the two. Yet, despite their global connectivity, these networks remained rooted in specific geographies. Rather then transform them, 'international activities *transpose* domestic networks' (Tarrow & Della Porta, 2005, p. 242). A full understanding of these networks requires, then, an understanding of the domestic context in which they operate (Khagram, 2004).

Understanding the domestic context, moreover, requires an appreciation of the continuing importance of the state for social movement network actors. As J. Smith notes there has been a tendency 'within social movement research to conceptualize social movement actors as opponents of the state' (2004, p. 315). Yet the fact remains that in 'many areas activists need to defend the state against other rising actors [e.g., transnational corporations] that threaten the aims of social movements' (p. 316). In particular, Bendaña (2006) argues, in the spirit of Polanyi's analysis, that many social movements in the global south reject shrinkage of the state and defend popular sovereignty and social welfare ideals.

A common approach to analyzing networks focuses on 'advocacy networks' that work beyond national borders. For Keck and Sikkink, advocacy networks 'plead the causes of others or defend a cause or proposition. They are organized to promote causes, principled ideas and norms' (1998, pp. 8–9). Of critical importance 'networks are communicative structures' and 'political spaces in which differently situated actors negotiate—formally or informally—the social, cultural, and political means of their joint enterprise' (p. 31).

While Keck and Sikkink's work has played a formative role in shaping perspectives on transnational social movement activism, Bennett (2005) maintains that a new generation of transnational activism has emerged. The first generation of transnational activism identified by Keck and Sikkink centered on non-governmental organizations and coalition 'campaigns aimed at national or international institutions to achieve specific policy goals' (Bennett, 2005, p. 212). The second generation of activists, argues Bennett, is characterized by diversity and direct, social justice, multi-issue, permanent campaigns along with the growing diffusion of

supranational targets. Crucial as well is the greater reliance on communication technologies to link issues through horizontal networks. Increasingly, this new generation of activists has become embedded within larger webs of activism.

Reitan (2007) modifies the duality of Bennett's model arguing that research favors the existence of a hybrid model, one that contains elements of both NGO advocacy and Bennett's second-generation model. In addition, Reitan adds another useful refinement of the second-generation model by stressing the importance of differences in solidarity found in activist networks. For example, advocacy networks are characterized by altruistic solidarity and sympathy for the suffering of others by those distant (often from the global north) from the problem. Yet, as transnational activism becomes more complex and strongly rooted in the global south, other forms of solidarity are exhibited. Thus, there is a greater emphasis on reciprocal solidarity that stresses empathy with the suffering of others along with perceived connection with their problem(s). To this can be added a third form of solidarity, that of identity, which is exhibited by those most immediate to the problem, personally suffering and perceiving a clear threat. As a later section indicates, the transnational Dalit movement of which the NCDHR is a part exhibits all three forms of solidarity. Moreover, the Dalits, like other hybrid transnational activist movements threatened by neoliberal globalization, advance what Reitan describes as bivalent claims, stressing both economic redistribution and cultural recognition and protection (identity).

As Tarrow and Della Porta (2005) and Reitan (2007) note, domestic networks transpose themselves in response to the threats posed by the external environment of neoliberal policies. These policies are often perceived as a threat to the protections and provisions of the welfare state (Udayagiri and Walton 2002) or a threat to the identity of adversely threatened groups. Frustrated by the inability to get desired results within a domestic context, activist networks transpose themselves and find common cause with other affected actors to combat neoliberal globalization on a transnational level. While, historically, transnational activists have found United Nations conferences, committees, and commissions to offer convivial space as opportunity structures more recently the WSF has become an increasingly important space for transnational activism and convergence. As I will indicate below, the Dalits have used both the UN and the WSF, inserting themselves into a larger, more complex web of transnational activism, one that makes bivalent claims. Moreover, I argue that as a social movement, the Dalits do not reject the state but see a more responsive state as key to advancing their claims.

In this regard the Dalits are acting as the other half of Polanyi's double movement, that is, as a protective countermovement. For Polanyi the double movement was key to understanding how history advances. The nineteenth century 'great transformation' led to the expansion of the free market as part of an attempt to disembed the market from society. At the same time, however, a countermovement occurred, one that reflected an impulse for social protection and which ultimately lead to the creation of the welfare state. In both instances the role of the state was critical. First, the state acted to 'disembed' the economy from existing social relations and to facilitate and protect the expansion of the market. Then, the state itself came under great pressure to make the 'process of economic improvement' 'socially bearable' (2001, p. 40). Polanyi argues, 'Indeed, humans society would have been annihilated but for protective countermoves which blunted the action of this self-destructive mechanism' (2001, p. 79).

This impulse towards social protection, however, was not merely economic. According to Polanyi:

> The outstanding discovery of recent historical and anthropological research is that man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual

> interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets. (2001, p. 48)

This, I argue, is particularly true of the Dalits who, as much as they are fighting for material goods, are fighting for social recognition and their human dignity.

Today, Polanyi's analysis in terms of the national level can be scaled upwards to the global level (Munck, 2007). Once again, the role of the state is being contested by a global countermovement of social movements attempting to reassert democratic control over the economy. Today this countermovement works at both the local and global levels, converging at the WSF to strategize how they can resist disembedding the economy from social relations. The Dalits are one among many social movements participating in this countermovement, which is organized on a networked basis. The Dalit decision to go global was a major one and to understand it one must understand the complexities of the Polanyi problematic within the Indian context. The following section discusses the impact of neoliberal globalization upon India, the Indian state, and the Dalits in particular.

Neoliberal Globalization Comes to India

When neoliberal globalization arrived in India in 1991 it represented a *volte face* in terms of the role of the Indian state in the economy and society. Gone was Nehru's vision of a democratic socialist republic ushering in development and secular modernity through means of state planning, import substitution industrialization, and a commitment to political and social justice. Like globalization in general, almost everything about neoliberal globalization in India is contentious, the exception being agreement on the immediate factors that precipitated the economic reforms of 1991. Beyond this, proponents and detractors disagree sharply, particularly on the impact of the NEP.

What precipitated the NEP in July 1991, according to most observers, was an economic and political crisis. The government of India faced a variety of severe problems, rising fiscal and current-account deficits, mounting domestic and foreign debt, high inflation, and dwindling foreign reserves (Teltumbde, 1999; Corbridge and Harriss, 2003). The fall of two governments, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, and minority government exacerbated the crisis. A rescue package from, and pressure by, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank led the government to adopt the NEP, which liberalized trade, abandoned import-substitution industrialization, and introduced a structural adjustment program (SAP) into the domestic economy. The SAP included a variety of measures such as privatization of the public sector, removal of restrictions on both private sector and foreign investment in the economy, an emphasis on export-led growth, and cuts in social services and welfare expenditures along with a wage freeze and cuts in public subsidies (Teltumbde, 1999; Das Gupta, 2004; Irudayam & Mangubhai, 2004). The result was the clear triumph of the market over the interventionist, welfare state.

At first glance, the NEP appears to be solely an external imposition by the IMF and World Bank on the Indian state. Yet, that explanation is too facile. In fact, the ruling castes and classes in India embraced the reforms and neoliberalism. Chopra, for example, maintains that neoliberalism was embraced both by the Indian state and much of Indian capital, establishing neoliberalism 'as a dominant discourse across India social space' (2003, p. 421). Elsewhere Corbridge and Harriss (2003) along with Shani (2004) depict economic liberalization as a part of an 'elite revolt' against the Nehruvian consensus of secularism, state socialism, and democracy. In brief, Corbridge and Harriss argue that in the decades prior to 1991 a democratic revolution had been underway in India marked by 'the countervailing forces of the lower half of

north Indian society and the forces of caste mobilization in general' (2003, p. 238). The result is 'that elements among India's forward castes, urban petty bourgeoisie and private industrial capital were in revolt of the slow but steady march to power in the country and in many state capitals' of the poor and dominated castes (2003, p. vii). Internally, as well, much of Indian industry had matured to the point where it was seeking greater autonomy from the state (Krishnaraj, 1999). Thus, the NEP can be seen as 'an undemocratic backlash' whereby various elements of India's elites sought to impose very different 'visions of order and modernity' upon the Indian masses, a modernity shaped by the discipline of the market and not by an interventionist, social democratic state (Corbridge and Harriss, 2003, p. 235).

Supporters of the NEP can point to dramatic growth exceeding 7% per annum (Wolf, 2006), a rising middle class, the development of a major information technology industry, and the fact that India is now seen by many as a rising economic and political power (Thorton, 2006).

However, there is another side to the story, one that claims India's economic performance prior to 1991 was better than acknowledged and that the impact of the NEP has been a negative one on most of India's population, particularly the Dalits. Some, for example, point to the fact that India's economic performance was never that bad, about 7% in the 1950s and 1960s, a mediocre 3.3% between 1965 and 1970, 4.3% per annum between 1970 and 1982, rising to a robust 5.5% in the years prior to the introduction of the SAP (Corbridge and Harriss, 2003, p. 78; Das Gupta, 2000, p. 184). From 1975 to 1989 the incidence of poverty fell from 54% to 37% (Lipton, 2000, p. 164). Others point to improvements in public health and literacy and the absence of great famines as in the past. In sum, while the Indian state prior to 1991 was in many ways corrupt, inefficient, and hardly an unbridled success, it was not, as neoliberals contend, a failure in terms of economic growth and social welfare.

Post-1991, those opposing neoliberalism paint a different picture of the reforms. For example, in terms of food security, a critical issue to the mass of India's poor, cuts in fertilizer subsidies led to rising prices of food grains (and inflation), and a slowing rate of food production (Das Gupta, 2000; Teltumbde, 1999; Irudayam & Mangubhai, 2004). Similarly, reforms had a negative impact on employment in the public sector that has not been balanced by employment growth in the private sector (Wolf 2006). The effects of the reforms upon poverty are claimed to be negative as well, particularly in rural areas. The result, according to Corbridge and Harriss, is that 'away from the textbook worlds of economic theory, the reforms in India seem to be making life harder for the poor, and they are making India society more unequal' (2003, p. 165).

The reforms, in particular, have had a negative impact upon India's Dalits. To understand why, one must recognize how important the Indian state, even with its inequities and dominant caste character, has been a means of social protection and improvement for the Dalits, who number between 170–200 million (estimates vary) or one-sixth of India's population. Historically, the Dalits represent the most marginalized, impoverished, and discriminated-against element of Indian society. In recent decades, thanks to state measures the lives of the Dalits have improved somewhat. In part, the positive role the state has played is due to the great Dalit leader, Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), recognized as the primary architect of the post-Independence constitution.

Under Ambedkar, the Indian constitution recognized the need for equality and social justice for all, values that continue to resonate in Indian society, motivating the poor and eating away at India's hierarchical society (Oommen, 2004, p. 245). Specifically, for the Dalits the constitution included a host of positive measures including the abolition of 'untouchability', forbidding its practice in any form. While it has not disappeared, the practice has eroded assisted by later anti-discriminatory and preventative laws.

Given the state's key role in the limited Dalit advancement that has occurred, the privatization of the public sector and the emphasis on the market as the allocator of resources are viewed as threats by the Dalits. Put differently, the Dalits have had representation in the state but not in the market. Reservations, that is, constitutionally mandated affirmative action in the public sector have, for example, led to gains in employment where 38% of Scheduled Castes[1] in urban areas have found employment. Together, reservations in public educational institutions and in public services have fostered an emerging Dalit middle class that is providing vital leadership to the Dalit movement which, in turn, 'has created hope for advancement in the entire Dalit population' (Teltumbde, 1999, p. 16).

Viewed from the perspective of the Dalits, privatization is not merely an economic decision in favor of the market allocation of resources, it is about the social and economic organization of power, a backward step leading to de-reservation by the backdoor. Moreover, given their absence of purchasing power, most Dalits are frozen out of the market. In addition, the mushrooming of dozens of private educational institutions offering IT and computer-oriented education has reinforced the exclusion of Dalits from India's most robust economic sector, because they cannot afford the tuition (Teltumbde, 1999).

While Dalit gains from the Indian state have been insufficient, they are nonetheless real. Yet, as one Dalit document notes,

> [the] established truth is that all these small gains and the impact thereof are set to be wiped out with the New Economic Policy. Faced with this grim prospect, Dalits need to oppose the dominant processes of globalization. (Irudayam & Mangubhai, 2004, p. 4)[2]

The Dalits, moreover, became very concerned in the 1990s over the rise of Hindu cultural nationalism, itself a partial result of the uncertainties unleashed by globalization and the search for meaning and identity (Shani, 2004, p. 47). Hindu nationalism, as Shani notes, 'may be seen as a middle class, high caste project of cultural homogenization that seeks to create a unified, homogeneous Hindu political identity by subsuming regional differences and caste hierarchies under the general category of "Hindu"' (Shani, 2004, p. 47). Hindu nationalism for the Dalits was a threat to their identity, marginalizing them even further within India society.

In taking their struggle for social and economic justice and cultural recognition and protection to the transnational level, the Dalits drew their inspiration from Ambedkar. For Dalits, Ambedkar is a source of immense pride and respect, not for only his remarkable educational achievements—two doctorates, one from the London School of Economics, the other from Columbia University—but also for his leadership in the struggle against untouchability, Hinduism, and his role as a founder of the modern Indian state. Today, Ambedkar serves not only as an inspiration for the Dalit movement but also as a source of legitimacy for actions, including the fight against casteism, not only nationally but globally.

In philosophical terms, Ambedkar distinguished himself from the other two giants of his generation, Gandhi and Nehru. Whereas Gandhi saw the world in terms of harmony, Ambedkar saw it in terms of contradictions, the most pre-eminent being the caste system, although he also regarded capitalism and class as oppressive.[3] In addition, Ambedkar was a modernist, a believer in enlightenment and in the state as an instrument of socio-economic justice. His emphasis on modernity and the state sets him apart from many locally focused Indian new social movements that are inspired by Gandhi and his vision of local empowerment, social harmony, and anti-secularism[4] (Omvedt, 2003).

Ambedkar also differed markedly from Nehru and others on the Indian left who ignored caste believing that the key struggle was 'economic—the relations of production and class struggle'

and once this struggle was resolved so, axiomatically, would be the problem of caste, a refrain familiar to other social movements. This blindness to caste was never lost on the Dalits who saw the leaders of socialist and Marxist-leftist parties as 'green snakes in green grass' unable 'to problematize and critique Hinduism and Brahmanism' (Ilaiah, 2002, p. 126).

Internationalizing the Dalit Movement

In important respects, Ambedkar embodies the key duality in the globalizing left between modernity and post-modernity, economic justice and the concurrent struggle for cultural recognition and social protection. Today, more than ever, Dalit activists are demanding socio-economic equality, the destruction of the caste system, and recognition and protection of their distinct identity. Increasingly frustrated by neoliberal globalization and unresponsive representative institutions, significant elements of the Dalit movement in the 1990s reorganized on a transnational basis. They widened the basis of their struggle against caste and shifted scales beyond the nation-state, a struggle very much premised on the ideas of Ambedkar. Yet, at the same time, as this article indicates, the Dalits insisted that the state retain its key role in terms of social protection and improvement.

Ambedkar himself set the precedent of Dalit internationalism through his intervention before the British Round Table Conference in London in 1930–1931. Although bitterly attacked by dominant caste leaders at the time, Ambedkar's intervention is credited with ensuring the formal rights and freedoms of the untouchables in the Indian constitution. According to two activists in the transnational Dalit movement:

> Ambedkar showed that boundaries for solutions to the problem of caste discrimination are not to be drawn around the village, district, state or nation. What is an internal solution or an external solution should not be determined by geographic borders or national borders. (Divakar and Ajai, 2004, p. 18)

In moving their struggle for economic justice and cultural recognition beyond India, Dalit activists were able to access a wide range of new political opportunity structures including the UN and the UN-sponsored World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in 2001 (WCAR). Most of the activities at these venues focused on issues of human rights broadly understood—political, economic, and social. However, the World Social Forum is where the Dalits have delivered their strongest indictment of the effects of global capitalism on the Dalit people. Their activities at the WSF are, however, closely linked to their activities at other venues.

Until the 1990s the internationalization of the Dalit issue was not done so much by Dalits in India but by a transnationally linked Dalit diaspora. During the 1950s and 1960s, Dalits began to emigrate: to the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and a number of other countries. Fewer in numbers than the dominant castes, they were often scattered. They kept in touch where they could and during the 1990s the series of networks among themselves and the Dalit movement in India became more extensive and complex 'not least due to their communication via the Internet' (Hardtmann, 2003, p. 150).

The Dalit disapora was instrumental in first raising Dalit issues outside India; for example, making representations on behalf of India's Dalits at the United Nations in the early 1990s. By 1998, thanks to the emergence of a Dalit middle class, improved organizational capacity, and communicative structures, a more extensive Dalit movement had taken shape, one composed of a variety of networks within India and abroad. While there is no central hub to the movement, in 1998 a key node emerged, the NCDHR. Its name belies the fact that this is a transnational and global campaign. Formation of the NCDHR reflects a growing capacity and confidence within

the Dalit movement. Unlike the northern-based diasporic networks, it is India-based and operates on all levels, from the local to the regional, national, transnational, international, and global. The NCDHR has played a key role in bringing the Dalit movement to a new level organizationally, advancing their cause at the UN and, very importantly, the UN-sponsored WCAR in Durban, South Africa. These interventions, in turn, fed into the GJM at the WSF. While the NCDHR is not the only India-based Dalit networked organization involved in transnational activism, it was one of the first and most visible and deserving of examination as a case study.

The NCDHR is a loose network structure with a National Secretariat in New Delhi and is composed of activists working in a variety of NGOs, including, prominently, the National Federation of Dalit Women, and other associated Dalit networks consisting of intellectuals, academics, trade unionists, writers, journalists, and social workers. Many came from southern India, but the campaign extends across the country (Hardtmann, 2003). Underlying the formation of the NCDHR is the key concern to publicize the plight of the Dalits at both the national and international levels, the latter with the intent of internationalizing the Dalit issue.

Indeed, the NCDHR's emphasis on the creation of public space is characteristic of advocacy networks and social movements in general. Historically, as Pandian notes, the Dalits have been excluded from the public sphere. As a social movement they have created a broad counter-public sphere 'where the politics of difference can articulate itself, and caste can emerge as a legitimate category of democratic politics' (Pandian, 2002, p. 25). The Dalits, in a pattern familiar to other advocacy networks, are acting in international and global public spheres appealing to international norms in order to penetrate the dominant Indian public sphere as part of their 'mobilization of shame'.

Accordingly, the NCDHR has two overarching aims closely linked to its primary concerns of publicity:

1) that India and the international community recognize that Dalit rights are human rights and decide to effectively abolish untouchability
2) to cast out caste so as to build a new, just social order. (NCDHR, 2003b)

As a part of the process of seeking international recognition and assistance when faced with internal and external threats, the NCDHR has associated itself with a variety of transnational networks. These networks represent a hybrid of first- and second-generation activism. Advocacy, for example, remains a key feature of these networks, but the networks also eschew a focus on any particular issue in favor of more permanent multi-issue campaigns, more involvement and leadership from the global south, and a mix of altruistic, reciprocal, and identity-based forms of solidarity.

In 2000, for example, the NCDHR took a significant step in transnationalizing the Dalit struggle by playing a formative role in the establishment of the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) based in Copenhagen, Denmark. The IDSN exists to:

1) promote the global recognition of Dalit human rights
2) act as an advocate with governments and international bodies and institutions
3) monitor enforcement of anti-caste discrimination
4) facilitate interventions at international and multilateral bodies.[5]

In August 2003, a secretariat for the IDSN was established in Copenhagen, Denmark. Funding for the secretariat has been obtained from a variety of organizations including the Ladenburg Foundation in the United States, Dan[ish] Church Aid, and the Comité Catholique contre le Faim et pour le Developement (CCFD).

Organizationally, the IDSN is composed of three types of networks representing distinct types of solidarity with the Dalits: 1) international human rights organizations; 2) national Dalit Solidarity Networks; and 3) national advocacy groups. International associates of IDSN include an extensive number of organizations, such as Human Rights Watch, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches, and the Asian Human Rights Commission. National Dalit Solidarity Networks have been established in the UK, France, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United States by development and human-rights NGOs and individuals. Much like the NCDHR, these networks conduct local awareness campaigns, alerting the media and lobbying governments to promote action to eliminate caste discrimination. Each national network, in turn, often includes a host of locally and internationally based network organizations. For example, the UK Dalit Solidarity Network includes two Ambedkarite organizations plus Amnesty International and Anti-Slavery International. The national solidarity networks work closely with Dalit organizations in South Asia.

Finally, there are four national advocacy platforms in the caste-affected countries of India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Japan. The first three are specifically Dalit platforms but a similar caste phenomenon exits in Japan, where the Buraku Liberation League campaigns for the eradication of discrimination against Buraku.[6] Beyond this, the NCDHR is linked to numerous other networks and NGOs. The national advocacy platforms clearly represent kindred reciprocal and identity solidarity with the first category of international human rights (and church) organizations having a greater emphasis on altruistic solidarity and the second category, national Dalit solidarity networks, a mixture of all three forms of solidarity.

The NCDHR has chosen venues where, with the assistance of the IDSN, they can maximize exposure at the international and global level. The first significant opportunity to highlight the issue of caste discrimination came with the UN-sponsored WCAR in 2001. This was both an international and global event, international in so far as it was an intergovernmental conference, global in the breadth of its issues and the thousands of people from civil society organizations who attended, both before, at an NGO forum, and during the WCAR itself. Although the NCDHR's effort to have casteism condemned at the WCAR was blocked by the Indian government, the conference ultimately proved advantageous to the Dalits. The NGO forum, for example, threw its support behind the Dalit cause. The media-savvy Dalit delegation of 200 representatives attracted mass media attention, internationally and within India. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan supported the Dalits and invited Paul Divakar of the NCDHR to speak before world leaders. According to Thekaekara, 'Divakar used the opportunity brilliantly. He made a succinct but moving presentation of the plight of India's 160 million Dalits. And he had his elite audience completely riveted' (2001, p. 315). Back in India, the NCDHR kept up the pressure, staging rallies to mobilize Dalits and holding press conferences to publicize the plight of the Dalits (Ahmed, 2004).

By this time, the NCDHR had developed the prototype of a campaign designed to maximize exposure at both international and national levels, one that was clearly in evidence at the Asian Social Forum in 2003 and the WSF Mumbai (2004). Their appeal to international norms has provided the legitimacy needed for the NCDHR to build their transnational networks.

The Road to the World Social Forum

At approximately the same time of their 2001 campaign leading up to and at the WCAR, the NCDHR was becoming involved with the WSF and the broader GJM. For some time, there had been awareness within the NCDHR of the relationship between neoliberal globalization and its negative impact on the Dalits. Moreover, there was a realization within the NCDHR

that globalization was a contradictory phenomenon. As the General-Secretary of the NCDHR, Vincent Manoharan, asked rhetorically, 'when you [India] internationalize your trade, when you internationalize your business, when you internationalize your market', should you not expect to be 'internationalizing your problems also? We've got every right to do that' (Manoharan, 2004).

For the NCDHR, the WSF demonstrated promise as another political opportunity structure, one that could be used specifically to contest neoliberal globalization. In 2001 the NCDHR sent Manoharan to investigate the WSF more closely. There he found it was 'an open space, that ... gives an opportunity to meet other similar people where you can build an alliance'. Moreover the 'WSF was totally against the globalization process. That is our focus' (Manoharan, 2004). In brief, the objectives of the NCDHR were consistent with the WSF as an open space, a meeting place which civil society organizations opposed to neoliberal globalization could call their own.

With its slogan 'Another World is Possible', the WSF was particularly attractive to the Dalits who were searching for another transnational venue that would compliment their activity at the UN on human rights. According to Manoharan (2004):

> So when I went to [the] WSF I thought it was the right platform by which we have got two legs. Earlier it was one, casteism. Now it is capitalism also. Casteism reflected in the form of untouchability, capitalism in the form of globalization. Now we had a double barrelled gun. Earlier it was one. Now it is two. Within India the casteist forces are the classist forces also. [And] the casteist forces are joining hands with the globalization forces.

Combined, then, venues at the UN and the WSF provided opportunities for the Dalits to fight against what Ambedkar identified as their main two sources of oppression—caste and class. While the General-Secretary distinguished between the purposes of the two venues, in fact their bivalent campaigns against caste and class have become intertwined at the WSF. That is, the struggles for human rights and against casteism and neoliberal globalization have become key features of Dalit activities at the WSF.

Since the WSF began in January 2001, the NCDHR has attended all its meetings, along with the European Social Forum (ESF) in 2003 and 2004 and the Asian Social Forum (ASF) in 2003. They were most visible at the WSF in Mumbai in 2004, where they played a major role in shaping the themes of the forum. The NCDHR has attended the various fora with the following purposes in mind:

1) Educational: to sensitize a variety of publics including their own counter-public on the impact of caste and globalization upon the Dalits.
2) Mobilization: to ensure when a social forum is held in India that as many Dalits as possible attend so as to leave a distinct Dalit imprint on these meetings.
3) Networking: to expand their networks within the Dalit community in India, within Dalit communities in South Asia, and within more NGOs and social movements around the world.
4) Solidarity: to join other mainstream movements in opposition to neoliberal globalization.
5) Advocacy: to promote and strengthen their advocacy efforts at various levels.

At the Asian Social Forum

The NCDHR has only been able to maximize their efforts in regard to the above at the ASF and the WSF Mumbai and to a lesser extent, the Polycentric WSF in Karachi in 2006. Before 2003,

Dalit participation at the WSF was limited to a minimal number of participants, as few Dalits could access funding to travel to Porto Alegre, Brazil. The decision to hold a regional social forum in Hyderabad, Andra Pradesh, in January 2003 changed all that. The ASF attracted 15,000 delegates from 80 countries but most came from India and South Asia. Many international delegates from other countries were prevented from entering India because of the delay in granting visas by the government of the right-wing pro-globalization Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) (Bidwai, 2003).

Similar to the WCAR, the NCDHR realized that the ASF represented an opportunity to both educate and mobilize their own constituency on the impact of neoliberal globalization. Thus, prior to the ASF, the NCDHR, who were part of the official forum organizing committee, began a campaign of education and mobilization of the Dalit community. They started in Andra Pradesh state, where the forum was to be held, meeting with various constituents of the Dalit movement—Dalit organizations, unions, and student movements. Simultaneously, they held a series of meetings in four other Indian states. The primary purpose of these meetings was:

> To spread the word about the ASF and why there was a need for the Dalit voice to be heard through the clamor of voices from across Asia that would attend this event, to mobilize groups to seize the opportunity to work together at this international conference. (NCDHR, 2003b)

This campaign was also necessary for the social forum process, which, while highly visible in Europe and South America, was virtually unknown in India.

At the ASF the Dalits were well represented, with nearly 7,000 participants (Jain, 2003) from 24 Dalit organizations along with 17 organizations from Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Japan, all countries that suffer from some type of caste discrimination. Joining them were participants from the IDSN, who also participated in the 11 seminars and 14 workshops sponsored by the NCDHR. The main event of the forum was a conference, 'Dalits, Other Social Groups and Globalization', attended by over 3,000 delegates and featuring speakers from caste-affected movements in India, Nepal, and Japan (NCDHR, 2003b).

At the various sessions, speakers and participants addressed a wide variety of topics related to the impact of neoliberal globalization, including the structural adjustment program, the privatization of health services, Dalit right to education, land rights, women's rights, social welfare cuts, and a host of related topics. Much of the indictment of globalization against the threats posed by neoliberal globalization is found in a well-researched NCDHR document entitled *Dalits on Globalization — Making Another World Possible* (2003a).

Particularly striking in the document is an analysis of the market as a social force. Unlike mainstream economics, which views the market as neutral and devoid of power relations, the document asserts the opposite proclaiming that 'the market is not neutral' and 'works in a discriminatory manner in the case of Dalits' (NCDHR, 2003a, p. 1). The market, moreover, as a site of power 'dictated by the social hierarchy' was excluding 'Dalits from entering productive processes', leading to 'increasing disparities in living standards between Dalits and the dominant castes'. There was, then, a need 'to bring a Dalit perspective into the current globalization discourse by making the linkages between untouchability, caste discrimination and denial of access to opportunities and choices in the global market.' It was, in addition, critical to demystify the 'myth of the neutrality of globalization process of structural adjustment, trade liberalization and privatization' (NCDHR, 2003a, p. 4).

What is striking about the fact sheets is its emphasis on social protection with repeated demands upon the state to act. Yet, here a shift can be detected, one that has only recently

been evident in Dalit strategy, that of demanding the state work to end Dalit exclusion from the market. Thus, according to one fact sheet:

> The Dalit community calls on the State to fulfill its constitutionally mandated responsibility to protect their stakes and promote equal access to the marketization process for social groups that have been historically marginalized and excluded from resources, skills and opportunities for participation. (NCDHR, 2003a, Fact Sheet I)

The above is an indication that the Dalits intended to contest the market as a place of caste exclusion using the state as a means to do so.

Fact Sheet XVII puts the Dalit struggle against casteism in historical and international perspective, in particular, their interventions at the United Nations where they have enjoyed increasing success. Caste, described by the UN as 'discrimination based on work and descent', has been recognized to exist in 20 countries in South Asia, Japan, and Africa affecting between 260 and 300 million people. Given its global dimensions, the struggle to eliminate caste could, therefore, no longer rely upon electoral politics, important as they were. It necessitated a 'new type of politics', one that involved a struggle 'which continues at multiple levels today, and that will continue to create interventions at the state, national and international levels until caste is cast out forever' (NCDHR, 2003a).

While the NCDHR was a prominent voice at the ASF, it was one among many Dalit voices. In addition, there were a variety of other social movements present including many Gandhi-inspired leftist groups who brought an anti-state and anti-politics perspective to the forum. However, as Jain notes, 'the reference to Gandhi had to be muted, as the Dalits would dissociate from the explicitly Gandhian presence (2003, p. 291).

On to Mumbai

As it turned out, the ASF was a 'dress rehearsal' to test the possibility of organizing the WSF in India, a test that turned out to be positive. The International Council of the WSF, its governing body, had in 2002 contemplated moving the annual meeting out of South America in an attempt to 'Asianize' it. Likewise, for the Dalits, it was a dress rehearsal for Mumbai where they were to display themselves on a much larger stage.

As part of the preparation for Mumbai, Dalits were represented on the Indian Organizing Committee (IOC), which included Manoharan of the NCDHR. There was widespread agreement in the committee to expand the limited focus of Porto Alegre on the social consequences of globalization to include other areas affected by neoliberal globalization, such as patriarchy and communalism (religious sectarianism and fundamentalism). There was initial reluctance by the IOC to highlight casteism as an issue worthy of being a major theme in Mumbai. According to Manoharan (2004), 'I remember the organizing committee meetings where the [caste] issue was raised. They said casteism is country specific, we are at the world level, why do we include that?' The response was a reminder that just as communalism, war and peace, and patriarchy were global issues, so was caste. Caste, said Manoharan,

> is not only in India, affecting 250 million people, it is in south and east Asia and it is not a question of our community, the Dalits. Other people are facing it, our brothers, the Romas [Gypsies], our Burakus [Japan], our Nigeria people [Orus, Osus] . . . are facing it [casteism].

Ultimately 'the WSF said it [casteism] would count' (Manoharan, 2004). In many ways, for the NCDHR, the WSF Mumbai was the ASF writ large in terms of their objectives, their

mobilization prior to Mumbai, their use of public space, and their core messages. Thus, for example, just as the NCDHR conducted a campaign of education and mobilization prior to the ASF, it conducted another campaign, on a larger scale, that reached millions of Dalits throughout India, in order to make the WSF and the issues of globalization meaningful to the Dalits (NCDHR, 2003b).

The scale of the WSF Mumbai was much larger than the ASF, with up to 130,000 participants attending each day. While most were South Asian, thousands of participants and NGOs from countries around the world were present, providing the Dalits with a large and varied audience. As they did at the ASF, the Dalits, an estimated 30,000-strong, made skilful use of the WSF as a public space of empowerment and appearances where they could make themselves and their causes known through drums, music, marches, and discussion.

The Dalits, the NCDHR and the IDSN among them, organized 14 well-attended events, ranging from seminars with hundreds in attendance to larger conferences with thousands. They focused on the key issues raised at the ASF—the impact of neoliberalization on the Dalits, including its intensification of casteism. There was, as well, little doubt of the Dalit belief in the potential efficacy of the state. As one participant put it, 'We must defend the Constitution of India . . . [for it] has invaluable provisions on fundamental human rights'. Yet, at the same time there was an awareness that the market posed an obstacle to Dalit advancement. As one Dalit participant asked, 'How can people denied basic rights compete in the market?'. Finally, the WSF was used to highlight the importance of internationalizing the caste issue, including other international communities discriminated against on the basis of work and descent. The intent was to put pressure on India and other governments with caste-like systems to apply international and national norms. Here the effort was supported by the IDSN and networked members such as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Yet, one must stress that Dalit activism at the WSF was more eclectic than that represented by the NCDHR and its network associates. For example, one of the main events at WSF Mumbai was the World Dignity Forum (WDF), which attracted 8,000 people. The WDF was sponsored by the National Conference of Dalit Organisations, a network of 300 Indian grassroots organizations working for Dalit empowerment, and the Heinrich Boll Foundation of Germany, a supporter of the NCDOR.[7] The WDF has become a broadly based forum, a blend of reciprocal and identity solidarity, united against all forms of discrimination—caste, ethnicity, gender, race, color, class, and religion. Overall, while the WDF has a wider focus than the NCDHR, their goals are not dissimilar.

As indicated above, networks at the WSF exhibited different forms of solidarity, but the primary emphasis remains very much centered on identity based on caste and others suffering from discrimination based on work and descent. Thus, for example, the NCDHR works closely with the Buraku of Japan through one of their primary organizations, the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), both at the WSF and also the UN. At the 2007 WSF in Nairobi, caste-like organizations from Africa, South Asia, and Japan participated on panels.

An emphasis on reciprocal solidarity at the WSF is also evident and growing. At both the WSF and other regional forums, the Dalits have made efforts to insert themselves into a wider range of networks on the basis of reciprocity. Thus, for example, the NCDHR participated at the European Social Forum (ESF) in London in October 2004. There they allied themselves with an international direct action network, 'No-vox' ('no voice') that includes the Landless Peasant's Movement of Brazil. No-vox articulates the rights of the 'les sans', those 'without': without land, rights, income or documents. After the ESF the NCDHR (albeit on a much

smaller scale) returned to Porto Alegre, Brazil for the fifth WSF. Prior to the WSF 2005 they traveled across Brazil meeting with landless peasants, took part in direct actions for the homeless, and organized several well-attended sessions at the WSF accompanied by their ever-present drummers and music. At WSF 2005, the NCDHR were accompanied by representatives of the NACDOR, who participated in a second WDF, one that focused on the struggle of the indigenous, peasant and black communities of Brazil and Columbia (Seligman and Oeffner, 2005).

Evident throughout, but very much in a supportive role, are the more altruistic organizations based in the global north such as the Lutheran World Federation. At one time, altruistic solidarity was a mainstay of social movement activism and scholarship in the global north (Reitan, 2007) but more recently it is clear that this form of solidarity has been displaced by identity and reciprocal solidarity at the WSF. This is not to say that altruistic solidarity from the global north is no longer important to the Dalits. On the contrary, at both the WCAF and WSF, the Dalits have enjoyed considerable attention and publicity from groups based in the global north. However, today, it is southern-based NGOS and networks, including those involving the NCDHR, that are taking the lead.

Conclusion: What Has Been Gained?

What emerges from the activities of the NCDHR and the Dalit movement generally at the UN, the WSF and the GJM is a strategy that recognizes in a globalizing world with a growing dispersal of power and influence that all structures—local, national, international, global, within civil society or the market—affecting casteism and their welfare must be contested. At the heart of this contestation is a 'mobilization of shame' directed at globalizing awareness of casteism in an effort to bring about domestic changes within India; to have the Indian government live up to national and international norms of human rights and to place greater emphasis on social justice. The WSF is one very important venue in this regard, but there are others.

The question is, has this strategy been working? Have the Dalits been successful, first, in internationalizing and globalizing awareness of casteism and second, in bringing about changes within India and the Indian state? In terms of the first, there are clear indications of success; in terms of the second, there are modest indications of real change within India.

The Dalits have been particularly successful at the UN. For example, since 1996, Dalits have been active in making representations to the UN, in particular, to the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. On more than one occasion, these agencies have made findings critical of the Indian government and supportive of the Dalits. In Geneva, on 19 April 2005, the UN Commission on Human Rights adopted by consensus a decision to appoint two Special Rapporteurs to prepare a three-year study and analysis of the problem of caste discrimination and to find solutions for its eradication in India and 20 other countries in South Asia, Asia (Japan), and Africa (Chandrakanth, 2005; Thekaekara, 2005). Each year the Special Rapporteurs will present their findings to the UN. Another result of this decision will be that each year there will be additional publicity, putting pressure on the Indian government to respond to the findings of the rapporteurs. Clearly, the Dalits have become increasingly able to 'name and shame' the practice of caste discrimination internationally.

There are close linkages between their activities at the UN and the WSF, one spilling over into the other. At the UN, the Dalits were supported initially by organizations which later became part the IDSN, in particular, the World Lutheran Federation and Human Rights Watch, and

later, the IDSN itself. Moreover, what the Dalits learned in terms of their UN activities, particularly the WCAR, fed into their mobilization efforts in the lead up to the Asian Social Forum and WSF Mumbai. In addition, the Dalit emphasis on the deleterious effects of neoliberal globalization is now feeding into the analysis of UN Special Rapporteurs, who acknowledge that caste communities are facing 'formidable' pressure from institutions of global governance and transnational corporations (United Nations, 2006).

Internationally, the spotlight has become more intense. On 22 November 2005, an extensive debate on the Dalit issue took place in the British parliament. The debate was initiated by Jeremy Corbyn, MP, a trustee and active supporter of the UK-based Dalit Solidarity Network which, in turn, is part of the IDSN. According to the DSN, the debates demonstrate 'the way caste discrimination is raising rapidly up the world human rights agenda' (Dalit Solidarity Network, 2005). Indeed, within Europe there has been intense lobbying of governments and the European Union by the IDSN and other Dalit Solidarity Networks.[8]

In a related vein, the Dalits are achieving greater publicity in a variety of international publics. Increasingly, researchers and the media are devoting more time and space to the Dalits. In 2005, for example, a variety of countries, including Canada, Greece, the United Kingdom, and France, produced radio and television documentaries sympathetic to the Dalits. The Canadian documentary quoted extensively from NCDHR sources. While there is no direct evidence to substantiate the linkage, the production of these documentaries followed on the heels of the public presence of the Dalits at WSF Mumbai 2004.

Within the WSF and GJM, the Dalits have made their campaign against casteism and social and economic injustice a mainstay of the WSF and the social forum process in general. Moreover, the Dalits are linking into other GJM networks opposed to discrimination, casteism, and other forms of oppression. In 2005, for example, Manoharan, General Secretary of NCDHR, participated in the annual meeting of 'Jobs For Justice', a network organization for US workers involved with the GJM and also a key player in the organization of what became the United States Social Forum (2007). On the same trip, Manoharan also had extensive meetings with government officials and politicians from the US, Denmark, and the European Commission, where he pursued the NCDHR's agenda of raising the visibility of the issue of caste (NCDHR, 2005). Dalit status within civil society and the GJM was further reinforced when Ruth Manorama, a longtime Dalit campaigner for the rights of Dalit women, president of the National Federation of Dalit Women, a member of the NCDHR and prominent participant at WSF 2004 and 2005, was awarded the Right Livelihood Award—otherwise known as the Alternative Nobel Prize—in 2006, bestowed by the Swedish parliament. All of the above indicates that Dalit rights issues are becoming mainstream and legitimate within and beyond the GJM.

Within an Indian context, the Indian government is showing some indication that it accepts the importance of social protection, that it is willing to balance economic liberalization with social justice. This development, however, took the defeat of the BJP government in May 2004 and its replacement by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition led by the Congress Party. How to accommodate the poor and India's Dalits and Adivasis and yet pursue economic liberalization has now become a contentious part of Indian politics. Increasingly, the government, lead by the new prime minister, Manmohan Singh, himself the prime architect of India's New Economic Policy, is coming under pressure to extend reservations, affirmative action, beyond government itself.

The idea of reservation in the private sector is anathema to most in the private sector, itself largely controlled by the dominating castes and hostile to Dalit advancement. This issue is yet to be decided but in December 2005, the UPA took a step towards doing so by passing a

new constitutional amendment obliging private schools, colleges, and professional training institutes that do not receive government funding to reserve more than one-quarter of their places for Dalit students as well as for other socially and economically disadvantaged groups (Das, 2006). There are, however, two important questions in regard to this development. Will this constitutional amendment be effectively implemented and does it serve as a 'fig leaf' for continuing neoliberalization policies by the Indian government?

The new constitutional amendment is a reminder that the focus of the Dalit struggle will continue to center 'around the state and the state idea' (Corbridge and Harriss, 2003, p. 238) even as it has now taken on a networked form spilling out into India's civil society and beyond, into the GJM.

While the NCDHR has been an important, visible part of this networked social contestation, the Dalit movement is much larger than the NCDHR. Moreover, there is no guarantee of completely ridding India of the stigma of casteism. The Dalit movement, vigorous as it is, is marked by poverty and fragmentation—of gender, region, language, religion, and to some extent today, class. All these place limits on what unity is achievable. In addition, differences with the neo-Gandhian new social movements are posing obstacles to finding a common strategy and common alternative program. However, while Dalit gains have been limited and painstakingly won, there is little doubt they are waging a permanent campaign for social protection and their dignity—locally, nationally, internationally, and globally.

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Notes

1 As defined by Corbridge and Harriss, Scheduled Castes (SCs) refer to 'the official term for Untouchable castes; those castes recognized by the Constitution as deserving special assistance in respect of education, employment and political representation' (2003, xix).

2 Overall, the Dalit indictment of neoliberal globalization is broad and deep. Particular concerns have been expressed over the negative impact of neoliberal globalization on the Dalits in terms of their right to land, employment opportunities, the persistence of chronic poverty, education and access to health care facilities, the impact on Dalit women, violence against Dalits, and Hindu nationalism.

3 Ambedkar's hostility to caste is exemplified in a historic quarrel with Gandhi in the 1930s. In terms of caste, Gandhi was an opponent of untouchability, but he did not want to abolish the 'varna' system, only reform it. According to Gandhi the untouchables could be added to the four-old varna system of Hinduism. The four varnas were the Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), and Shudras (servants). Outside of the varna system, and, therefore, polluted, were the untouchables. Gandhi felt the untouchables, who he called 'Harijans'—men of God—could be incorporated within the varna system (Hardtmann, 2003). In effect, Gandhi saw untouchability as an aberration within Hinduism and through a change of heart and mind by the 'higher' (dominant) castes it could be rooted out. Ambedkar, on the other hand, felt untouchability was not an aberration of Hinduism but was inextricably bound up with it and could not be rooted out as simply as Gandhi implied, a judgement that has proven historically accurate. Whereas Gandhi was willing to accept the hierarchical varna system, for Ambedkar caste was a 'monster' (Nanda, 2003, p. 192).

4 Perhaps the best know exemplar of neo-Gandhian ideas is the eco-feminist Vandana Shiva, who acknowledges the continuing relevance of Gandhi's ideas in the struggle against globalization. See http://www.navdanya.org/about/practice_earth_dem.htm.

5 IDSN website: http://www.idsn.org/

6 See the website of the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism: http://www.imadr.org/.

7 For more on the NACDOR, which was founded in 2001, see http://www.nacdor.org. NACDOR is not mentioned by the NCDHR but they do associate, having cooperated in support the Millennium Development Goals Campaign, for example. The NCDHR also participated in the inaugural conference of the NACDOR and the establishment of the South Asia Dalit Rights Forum in Karachi 2006. See the website of the Millennium Campaign Action Center (http://www.millenniumcampaign.org/site/pp.asp?c=grKVL2NLE&b=490381) and NACDOR (2001).

8 For a detailed breakdown of lobbying activities see the Annual Reports of the IDSN, various years: http://www.idsn.org/.

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